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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the consensus statements developed by the Learning Disabilities Roundtable (February 2002), a meeting of the 10 member organizations of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities to provide input for the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The Roundtable resulted in defined areas of consensus on essential issues related to the nature of specific learning disabilities, identification, eligibility, intervention, and professional development. Following an introduction section, this report is divided into three sections: (1) description of the methodology used to facilitate the consensus-building process; (2) a narrative description fo the statements of consensus developed by the Roundtable participants; and (3) a brief conclusion. Following the conclusion is a report developed by a Roundtable sub-group describing a promising problem-solving approach to identifying individuals with specific learning disabilities. Appendices include the list of Roundtable consensus statements and the names of the Roundtable participants. (Contains 27 references.) (DB)

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SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES: FINDING COMMON GROUND

A report developed by the ten organizations participating in the Learning Disabilities Roundtable

Sponsored by the Division of Research to Practice
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES: FINDING COMMON GROUND 1

INTRODUCTION 1

Background 1

METHODOLOGY 2

Initial Planning and Response to "White Papers" 2
Two-day Meeting 3
Draft Statements 3
Final Meeting 3

STATEMENTS OF CONSENSUS 4

Nature of Specific Learning Disabilities 5
Identification 6
Eligibility 8
Intervention 9
Professional Development 11

CONCLUSION 13

ACHIEVING BETTER OUTCOMES - MAINTAINING RIGHTS: AN APPROACH TO IDENTIFYING AND SERVING STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES 15

BACKGROUND 15
INTRODUCTION 15

The Issue 16
The Challenge 16
A Proposed Solution 17
Potential Administrative Benefits of this Approach 19
Personnel Requirements for Implementation 20
Questions, Concerns and Resources Needed to Support this Approach 22
Moving Forward 24
Selected Resources 26

APPENDIX A: CONSENSUS STATEMENTS 29
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT LIST 32

SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES: FINDING COMMON GROUND

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 2.8 million students have Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), making up 51 percent of all individuals receiving special education services under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (22nd Annual Report, 2000). The identification of these individuals, and the system designed to address their needs, is of fundamental concern to a vast spectrum of people, including families, professional educators, and policymakers. In preparation for the reauthorization of IDEA, as well as implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has convened researchers and policy organizations concerned about individuals with SLD in a series of events designed to review the major issues in the field and develop statements of consensus on what is valued and should be promoted to improve programs for these individual students. The goal is to find common ground.

This report summarizes the consensus statements developed by the Learning Disabilities Roundtable, coordinated by the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), which convened on February 4 –5, 2002 and June 17-18, 2002 in Washington, D.C., as part of the OSEP Research to Practice *Learning Disabilities Initiative*. Roundtable participants included member organizations of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD). To understand the context for the statements contained in this report, background leading up to the Roundtable meetings is presented below.

Background

On August 27 and 28, 2001, more than 200 researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and parents of individual students with SLD attended the *Learning Disabilities Summit: Building a Foundation for the Future*, held in Washington, DC. This event was part of the OSEP-sponsored *Learning Disabilities Initiative* on issues related to the identification of individuals with SLD. The Summit showcased a series of research papers prepared by nationally recognized experts in the field. The papers synthesized and organized the most current and reliable research on key issues in the identification and classification of individuals with SLD. Following the Summit, OSEP organized roundtables of key stakeholders. This report represents the work of the learning disabilities organizations that make up the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), in their effort to examine the research papers and find issues on which there exists common ground to all organizations, as well as those that are unique to certain groups.

Roundtable participants worked together to define areas of consensus on essential issues related to the nature of specific learning disabilities, identification, eligibility, intervention, and professional development. The remainder of this report is divided into three sections: 1) description of the methodology used to facilitate the consensus-building process, 2) a narrative description of the statements of consensus developed by the Roundtable participants, and 3) a brief conclusion. Following the conclusion is a report developed by a Roundtable sub-group describing a promising problem-solving approach to identifying individuals with specific learning disabilities (see Exhibit A). Appendices include the list of Roundtable consensus statements and the names of the Learning Disabilities Roundtable participants.

METHODOLOGY

This methodology section outlines the process used by the Learning Disabilities Roundtable to develop their consensus statements and formulate this report. The organizations participating in this event from the *National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities* (NJCLD) consist of the following:

- Association for Higher Education and Disability, AHEAD
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, ASHA
- Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Communicative Disabilities and Deafness, DCDD
- Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Learning Disabilities, DLD
- Council for Learning Disabilities, CLD
- Learning Disabilities Association of America, LDA
- International Dyslexia Association, IDA
- International Reading Association, IRA
- National Association of School Psychologists, NASP
- National Center for Learning Disabilities, NCLD

The process these organizations employed to develop their consensus statements unfolded through three steps: 1) initial planning and response to "white papers," 2) two-day Roundtable meeting, and 3) developing draft consensus statements.

Initial Planning and Response to "White Papers"

During an organizing meeting that was held in October 2001, the organizations comprising the NJCLD reviewed the process design, established a timeline for the work, defined the scope of work, and selected five working categories that became the focus of the organizations' responses. The five areas include the following: Nature of Learning Disabilities, Identification Process, Eligibility Criteria, Intervention, and Professional Development.

Following this meeting, each participating group reviewed the "white papers" developed on these topics by leading researchers, and produced a written response considered to be representative of their organization's core constituency. A template was developed and used by the organizations to provide consistency in the structure across the papers.

Two-day Meeting

Information from the response papers was converged into a set of charts used to facilitate discussions during a Roundtable meeting held February 4-5, 2002. Each issue was discussed at length and areas of consensus and policy implications were discussed for each of the working categories. Additionally, a working subgroup was formed to study a problem-solving approach related to identification, eligibility criteria, and interventions. They were further charged with developing a problem-solving approach for the group to consider.

Draft Statements

Following the two-day Roundtable meeting, a set of SLD consensus statements was developed by drawing from the following sources:

- Wall notes from the group discussion;
- Specific language from a set of "research group" statements identified by the Roundtable participants during the two-day meeting;
- Specific language from organizational papers identified by Roundtable participants during the two-day meeting;
- Statements from the NJCLD Professional Development for Teachers brochure; and
- The matrix-based statements drawn from the organizational papers, as revised by the group during the two-day meeting.

The Roundtable organizations were asked to respond to these consensus statements by revising or deleting them, adding new ones, and as much as possible, rank ordering them. The organizations edited the statements, and revised statements were sent back to the organizations for another review. Each organization responded with feedback.

This report culminates from the process described above. The body of this report lists the consensus statements with narrative comment seeking to capture the common and diverse set of voices coming together to form these statements.

Final Meeting

A clarification meeting occurred in June 2002 to finalize the consensus statements. Following this meeting a second work group met to analyze and discuss the problem- solving approach for identifying and supporting determination of eligibility. A subgroup report describing this approach, with input from the other Roundtable participants, is included in this document as Exhibit A.

STATEMENTS OF CONSENSUS

Participants in the Learning Disabilities Roundtable engaged in a period of reflection, sharing, and feedback to develop common understanding of the major issues affecting the identification of individuals with SLD, and to establish statements of consensus on what they believe and value. They began their work recognizing that the passage of PL-94-142 in 1975 opened a world of opportunity for individuals with SLD. In the following years reauthorization of IDEA enabled the educational community to deepen its commitment to all individuals with special learning needs by expanding the range of service options to individuals at early stages of development, increasing opportunities for technical support and staff development, and conducting research on effective practices. Individual students throughout the special education continuum have realized enormous benefits from this law. Still, there are improvements that can be made, in both the identification of individuals with SLD, and the determination of eligibility for special education and related services.

Participants expressed concern about inappropriate identification of individuals with SLD, emerging as a problem over the past three decades. They cited issues in the field where repeated concerns have been expressed regarding the manner in which individuals are identified as SLD, the manner in which educational services are provided once eligibility has been established, and the types of services and interventions that are available to educators and support personnel. The field is concerned about inappropriate referrals to special education resulting from a process that needs to become more accurate, timely, and efficient. Further, Roundtable participants believe classroom teachers are left too often without useful support, even when the referral and identification process is completed in a timely and efficient manner.

Roundtable participants perceive the upcoming reauthorization process as an opportunity to rethink the current models used for identification, determination of eligibility, and service delivery, and to study and consider promising new models that will address more appropriately the needs of all students, particularly those with SLD. They pursued this endeavor through analysis and discussion of issues falling into five categories: 1) the nature of specific learning disabilities, 2) identification of individuals with specific learning disabilities, 3) eligibility for services, 4) interventions, and 5) professional development.

At the heart of their beliefs and recommendations, the Roundtable participants support a comprehensive and coherent system where each of these five categories is aligned along common principles. Significant attention was given to the need for a comprehensive evaluation model that will improve school capacity to identify individuals with SLD and make informed decisions regarding eligibility. Problem-solving approaches were identified as promising practices to consider. Participants believe resources should be allocated to provide opportunities to further study these models and provide additional data, including indicators of outcomes for students with SLD. At the core of a high-quality education is effective delivery of appropriate research-based interventions by teachers and other professionals, and on-going monitoring and assessment coordinated by interdisciplinary teams. Still, participants expressed concern that positive results and improvement will not occur unless teachers and other professionals in the system have the knowledge, skills, and administrative support to implement these new measures within a collaborative system that brings regular and special educators, related services personnel, and administrators together.

For purposes of this process, consensus is defined as statements the organizations could stand by and support. Statements of consensus organized by the five categories are presented below, followed by a brief discussion of each statement.

Nature of Specific Learning Disabilities

Roundtable participants agreed on the following core concepts as basic elements of the nature of SLD: Specific Learning Disabilities are neurologically-based, intrinsic to the individual, persist across an individual's lifespan at varying levels of intensity, and are not due primarily to other disabling conditions.

Consensus statements related to these issues are presented and briefly described below.

- *The concept of Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) is valid, supported by strong converging evidence.*

Participants draw on converging evidence to support SLD as a distinct disability. There is evidence for heterogeneity of SLD.

There was little support for changing the current definition of SLD, but organizations agreed on the need for changes in current regulations regarding identification and eligibility.

- *Specific learning disabilities are neurologically-based and intrinsic to the individual.*

Participants support the concept that neurological deficits intrinsic to the individual are the basis for SLD. Such disorders result in performance deficits in spite of quality instruction and predict anomalies in the development of adaptive functions. In discussing these relationships several Roundtable papers made reference to "marker variables" and "core cognitive deficits." The identification of a core cognitive deficit, or a disorder in one or more psychological processes, that is predictive of an imperfect ability to learn is a marker for a specific learning disability. Participants suggest this results in the "imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations," as referred to in IDEA. Some participants noted this is an incomplete list of behaviors and should include the concepts of social and emotional development and oral expression.

- *Individuals with specific learning disabilities show intra-individual differences in skills and abilities.*

The concept of "unexpected underachievement" was also considered. Participants believe SLD is characterized by intra-individual variability in cognitive processing, academic achievement, and life activities. This variability results in unexpected areas of underachievement.

- *Specific learning disabilities persist across the life span, though manifestations and intensity may vary as a function of developmental stage and environmental demands.*

Because the disorder resulting in SLD is intrinsic to the individual and has a neurological

basis, it does not disappear over time. While Roundtable participants believe it is important to recognize the life-long nature of the disorder, they also acknowledge that manifestations and intensity of the disability may vary for individuals during different stages of development.

- *Specific learning disabilities may occur in combination with other disabling conditions, but they are not due to other conditions, such as mental retardation, behavioral disturbance, lack of opportunities to learn, primary sensory deficits, or multilingualism.*

A number of participants believe implementation of the current definition and regulations regarding identification of SLD has resulted in a heterogeneous population, often overlapping with other conditions. This has led to the erroneous inclusion of those with other learning and behavioral problems into the learning disability category and excluded others with SLD. Participants support the concept that SLD may occur in combination with other disabilities, but it is not due to these conditions.

- *Specific learning disabilities are evident across ethnic, cultural, language, and economic groups.*

Roundtable participants draw on research to support the concept that students with SLD can differ in terms of ethnic, cultural, language, and economic experiences. Specific learning disabilities occur within each of these groups.

Identification

Improving the process and methods used to identify individuals with SLD was a central issue addressed by the Roundtable. Participants expressed concern about the current process that uses ability-achievement discrepancy formulas as the primary criteria for identifying individuals with learning disabilities. They expressed concern that discrepancy formulas are unreliable and are not a valid marker for SLD. Participants responded by supporting the need for conducting a comprehensive evaluation that draws from multiple sources, including informed clinical judgment, and by suggesting further study and development of an approach schools can use in the future. A problem-solving approach was discussed as a promising process for the field to consider and study in a variety of settings. Finally, participants stressed the need for regular educators to assume a greater role in the identification process through a collaborative relationship with special educators and related service personnel.

Consensus statements related to these issues are presented and briefly described below.

- *Identification should include a student-centered, comprehensive evaluation and problem-solving approach that ensures students who have a specific learning disability are efficiently identified.*

Participants support existing IDEA requirements for a comprehensive evaluation that will use multiple measures, methods, sources of information, and clinical judgment to identify individual students with SLD. Important sources cited by the Roundtable participants include, but are not limited to, interviews with teachers and family members, standardized tests, teacher logs, student products, student records, observations, and continuous progress monitoring of performance. This

statement is shaped by the guiding principle that no one particular measure or source is capable of providing sufficient information for accurately and reliably identifying individuals with SLD. A comprehensive evaluation will provide an accurate assessment of student strengths and weaknesses and should assist in identifying needed services and interventions.

Participants also stress the need for interdisciplinary teams to collect, review, and interpret data from these sources using a valid problem-solving approach. Such an approach must be capable of distinguishing between students who have specific learning disabilities and students with mental retardation and other disabilities, as well as those with no disabilities who may experience learning problems due to lack of adequate instruction and other factors.

Participants believe a comprehensive evaluation approach should be designed and validated to guide the identification of students with learning disabilities. Participants expressed frustration with the current emphasis on ability-achievement discrepancy formulas, stating that as practiced in schools they have not proven to be a valid approach to identifying individuals with SLD. In addition, they express concern that the current process provides limited information regarding needed instructional interventions. These participants point to emerging evidence suggesting there may be promising new approaches to strengthen this process.

One example currently being implemented and studied is a problem-solving approach, which has implications for both identification and eligibility decisions. A Roundtable sub-group met to study, discuss and analyze this approach. Their report, *Achieving Better Outcomes - Maintaining* Rights: An Approach to Identifying and Serving Students with Specific Learning Disabilities, follows the concluding section of this document as Exhibit A. This Exhibit reflects input from the various organizations participating in the Roundtable, recognizing the benefits and challenges to such an approach.

- *Regular education must assume active responsibility for delivery of high quality instruction, research-based interventions, and prompt identification of individuals at risk while collaborating with special education and related services personnel.*

The vast majority of individuals with SLD will begin their educational experience in a regular education classroom. These teachers are responsible for all students in their classrooms, including those experiencing difficulty. This involves providing high quality instruction for all students, but it also focuses critical attention on the need for regular education teachers to promptly identify individuals at risk, and the key role they play in providing high quality, scientifically-based interventions as mandated in the No Child Left Behind Act.

The Roundtable participants acknowledge that special educators and related service providers have a special role in working with individuals with SLD who require specialized instruction designed to meet their unique needs. They also believe the capacity of the identification process and delivery of high quality interventions is significantly strengthened as regular and special educators bring their unique knowledge and skills together in collaborative relationships. Participants noted that building these relationships involves co-learning and co-sharing and can result in a common effort to help all students.

Eligibility

Once a child has been identified as having a specific learning disability, decisions need to be made regarding eligibility and appropriate interventions and services. Roundtable participants believe ability-achievement discrepancy formulas should not be used for determining eligibility, and support using multiple sources of information to make strategic decisions on interventions and services needed for each individual. Participants believe an interdisciplinary team should make these decisions, and several participants strongly believe parents must be an integral part of the decision making process. They further stressed the need for these teams to make eligibility decisions in a timely manner to ensure student needs are addressed. Finally, participants support the concept that individual students may need varying levels and types of services.

Consensus statements related to these issues are presented and briefly described below.

- *The ability-achievement discrepancy formula should not be used for determining eligibility.*

Roundtable participants agree there is no evidence that ability-achievement discrepancy formulas can be applied in a consistent and educationally meaningful (i.e., reliable and valid) manner. They believe SLD eligibility should not be operationalized using ability-achievement discrepancy formulas. They also believe alternative approaches to eligibility determination must be developed, validated, and implemented as soon as possible.

- *Decisions regarding eligibility for special education services must draw from information collected from a comprehensive individual evaluation using multiple methods and sources of relevant information.*

This theme is consistent with the guiding principle of conducting a comprehensive evaluation to identify individuals with SLD. Roundtable participants believe that once identification has occurred, decisions regarding eligibility and needed services should draw on several sources of information. Participants believe this will strengthen the ability of the system to make optimal decisions to meet the unique needs of each individual.

- *Decisions on eligibility must be made through an interdisciplinary team, using informed clinical judgments, directed by relevant data, and based on student needs and strengths.*

Participants believe capacity for making optimal eligibility decisions can be enhanced through an interdisciplinary team where members communicate freely across disciplines and have substantial knowledge regarding testing and test results. In this manner, decisions are based on a team assessment of the sources of information that represents an integrated synthesis of different perspectives, rather than drawing on a single voice or loose collection of different, disconnected voices. Participants believe the team should specifically include at least one person qualified to conduct individual diagnostic examinations of children, such as a school psychologist, speech-language pathologist, or remedial reading teacher. Participants stressed the need to include an education professional with identified competencies in SLD. It was pointed out that 80 percent of specific learning disabilities are language-based disorders, and participants believe teams should include personnel with appropriate expertise. Parent participation was also emphasized as critical.

- *Decisions on eligibility must be made in a timely manner.*

Participants believe decisions regarding student eligibility must be made in a timely manner. Roundtable participants were sensitive to the timeliness of these decision processes to ensure that student needs for services are addressed.

- *Based on an individualized evaluation and continuous progress monitoring, a student who has been identified as having a specific learning disability may need different levels of special education and related services under IDEA at various times during the school experience.*

Roundtable participants believe IDEA must continue to provide for the civil rights that enable students with SLD to receive special education and related services. Within this principle is the concept that individuals identified with SLD may need different types and levels of services to meet their needs. Additionally, student needs and services may change at different points in the individual's school experience. According to participants, "different levels" refers to the need to provide a continuum of services and strategies, and with varying intensity of supports. Such decisions should be student-centered by focusing on meeting the needs of each individual.

Intervention

Delivery of effective interventions plays a central role in the concerns discussed by the Roundtable participants. The prelude to any intervention process must be effective instruction in the regular education classroom. Running records, checklists, and other data gathering activities can help teachers and others frame concerns about a student's progress. Participants noted that successful intervention depends on delivery of high quality, scientifically-based interventions by regular and special educators and related service providers, as provided for in the *No Child Left Behind Act.* For this to occur, schools and service providers must have access to information about these interventions. Participants also believe interventions are most effective when they are implemented consistently and with fidelity, with a sufficient level of intensity, and are relevant to student needs. Participants support particular types of interventions for students with SLD, such as explicit instruction, and support a continuum of intervention options. Finally, Roundtable participants envision regular and special educators and related service providers learning and working together as part of a coherent system that is accountable for educational outcomes for students with SLD, a theme that cuts across all areas. Given these considerations, some participants stressed the need for regular education law and regulations to address the key measures regarding regular education activities discussed in this report.

Consensus statements related to these issues are presented and briefly described below.

- *The field should continue to advocate for the use of scientifically-based practices. However in areas where an adequate research base does not exist, data should be gathered on the success of promising practices.*

The NCLB law mandates use of "scientifically-based" practices and interventions to help all individuals learn. Use of such practices is a cornerstone of the problem-solving approach, which builds on the assumption that teachers and other service providers are delivering high quality interventions. Consistent with these issues, Roundtable participants believe it is essential to advocate for the use of scientifically-based practices that have been validated through rigorous, well-designed,

objective, and systematic studies, and have been assessed with positive results through some type of peer review. Additionally, in areas where an adequate research base does not exist, participants support the use of promising practices that have been identified by small case studies or other non-experimental designs with positive results. Opportunities should be made available for conducting further research using rigorous methodology to validate the effectiveness of such practices.

- *Schools and educators must have access to information about scientifically-based practices and promising practices that have been validated in the settings where they are to be implemented.*

Schools and educators must be made aware of scientifically-based practices and interventions that work in settings similar to their own. Such practices cannot be implemented unless schools and teachers are sufficiently aware of them. This also requires that teachers and other education personnel have the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to implement the interventions for all individuals. To accomplish this, schools must have a context that supports use of these interventions as a priority through high expectations, relevant professional development, and encouragement from local leaders and colleagues alike. This comes about through a culture of instruction and support involving parents, educators, related service personnel, and administrators who all have a common focus on improving student learning.

- *Students with specific learning disabilities require intensive, iterative (recursive), explicit scientifically-based instruction that is monitored on an on-going basis to achieve academic success.*

Roundtable participants support use of scientifically-based practices for students with SLD such as intense remediation, and instruction that is direct, explicit, cumulative, systematic, and strategic. For example, some students with SLD may require one-on-one tutoring or tutoring in small learning groups with other students. Some participants specifically promote intervention using structured language emphasis for all individuals with language-based learning disabilities. While types of instruction and support may differ depending on individual student needs, on-going monitoring is needed at all levels to achieve academic success.

- *Students with specific learning disabilities require a continuum of intervention options through regular and special education across all grades and ages.*

Participants support a continuum of intervention options through regular and special education. Depending on the student's abilities and needs, this can occur through accommodations, modifications, intense instruction, and remediation. Accommodations allow a student to complete the same assignment or test as other students, but with a change in the timing, formatting, setting, scheduling, response, and/or presentation. The accommodation does not alter what the test or assignment measures, but serves as a support directly related to the student's disability. Modification is an adjustment to an assignment or a test that alters what the assignment or test is designed to measure. This occurs when the reading material assigned to a student is altered or made easier than the material assigned to other students in a regular education class.

Accommodations and modifications are primarily concerned with helping students access the general education curriculum. In contrast, remediation and the development of compensatory strategies are a priority in special education. For example, intense, structured language interventions are employed to remediate severe reading disabilities. Participants believe that for students with

severe learning disabilities who need remediation or compensatory strategies, accommodations and modifications are never a substitute for these services.

- *Interventions must be timely and matched to the specific learning and behavioral needs of the student.*

Interventions implemented by schools and teachers must be timely and address the needs of their students. Students have unique learning needs and it is imperative that interventions are relevant and responsive to these needs. If responsive and relevant interventions are not provided in a timely fashion, the student's problems are likely to intensify and become more complex.

- *An intervention is most effective when it is implemented consistently, with fidelity to its design, and at a sufficient level of intensity and duration.*

Roundtable participants believe interventions are most effective in helping individual students when they are implemented consistently and at the level of intensity and fidelity appropriate to the intervention design. Interventions and practices will often be adapted to fit local circumstances and needs, and this can increase ownership and responsiveness, but the integrity of the core defining elements of an intervention must be maintained while it is put into practice.

- *Regular and special education must be coordinated as part of a coherent system which is held accountable for the educational outcomes of students with specific learning disabilities.*

Roundtable participants recognize and value the need for regular and special educators and related service providers to work collaboratively as part of a coherent system in planning and delivering interventions. Coherence occurs when there is alignment of principles defining all aspects of the system, including instructional goals, delivery of instruction and services, assessments, pre-service training, and professional development. All levers are pulling together in the same direction, and reinforcing each other. Participants envision a future where regular and special education and related service providers know and respect each other, and depend on each other in collaborative relationships to best serve their students within a well-aligned system. In this system, regular and special educators and related service personnel share basic assumptions and espouse common beliefs about teaching and learning. In turn, these shared assumptions and beliefs are manifested in activities that can be seen, such as a shared professional community that includes planning, team teaching and projects, and professional development. With regular and special educators and related service providers bringing distinct knowledge and skills into this relationship, the strengths of each player are appreciated and used to make the whole school or system greater than the sum of its parts.

Participants believe that holding regular and special education entities accountable for the educational outcomes of all students with SLD will encourage coherence, collaboration, and joint responsibility for all individual students with SLD. Participants believe the goals of the regular education accountability system must reflect these priorities.

Professional Development

Roundtable participants recognize that all the best intentions and new designs for improving the identification process and delivery of scientifically-based interventions will fall short if the professional educators, administrators, and related and support personnel responsible for implementing these designs do not have the knowledge, skill, or will to implement and sustain them. The Roundtable participants recommend changes in professional development that will reinforce the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to implement critical structures and processes, such as comprehensive evaluation, interdisciplinary team problem-solving, quality delivery of scientifically-based interventions, and collaboration among regular and special educators and related service personnel. To achieve this, participants believe professional development practices must meet recognized standards for professional development articulated by the standards for beginning and experienced teachers and related service providers through relevant professional groups. Standards relate to important issues of content, process, and context. Additionally, participants raised concerns about the need for greater coherence and alignment in the systems that provide pre and in service training for professional educators based on effective principles for teaching and learning.

Consensus statements related to these issues are presented and briefly described below.

- *The content of professional development must address the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to increase staff and school capacity to implement effective interventions for diverse learners.*

Roundtable participants believe the *content* of professional development must be driven by the knowledge and skills needed to implement high quality instruction, and a comprehensive, coherent system that provides for accurate identification of individuals with SLD, effective eligibility decisions, and delivery of high quality instruction. Participants believe information from databases on performance aligned with these needs can appropriately focus the content of professional development on expected competencies and areas that need to be addressed. They recommend collection and analysis of data on student learning in a timely fashion and in a manner that maximizes use by school administrators, teachers, and related service providers.

- *Professional development must address the organizational and cultural context needed to ensure on-going professional learning and development for all service providers.*

Participants support the concept that professional development must address contextual issues needed to ensure that professional learning occurs and is sustained. There is a need for an administrative commitment to developing a positive school climate that results in increased collaboration among regular and special educators, related service providers, administrators, staff, family, and community; and the allocation of adequate resources necessary to ensure continuous professional growth.

- *Professional development must be structured to fit the way adults acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes.*

Participants believe the processes used in professional development must be structured in a way that respects the adult learner. All educators need to be directly taught the knowledge and skills needed to implement the activities called for in this report, including high quality instruction in regular and special education. They also need on-going opportunities for practice, critical feedback and sharing, observation of effective practice, and learning through application under the guidance of a mentor and supportive professional community. Educators need to engage in sustained study of

what they teach, how they teach it, and student results. Participants believe professional development is not a single event, but a continuum of integrated, on-going learning opportunities.

- *An on-going, coherent, integrated system of pre-service and in-service education must be provided.*

Participants expressed concern about the lack of alignment between pre- and in- service education for professional educators, and the degree to which these structures have not been responsive to the critical needs of students, teachers, and other related service providers. Roundtable participants support the concept of an integrated and coherent system of professional learning that consistently reinforces and enhances the skills, knowledge, and attitudes for regular and special educators, administrators, as well as related and services personnel. Roundtable participants specifically noted that such a system should include school-based professional development combined with on-site induction and mentoring.

- *Alignment is needed across the agencies and structures that shape professional development and communicate what is valued and expected in schools.*

Consistent with the last recommendation, Roundtable participants recommend alignment and coherence across the entire system of agencies and processes responsible for communicating what is valued for professional learning. This includes, among others, accreditation agencies, textbook publishers, certification authorities, school districts, teacher unions, professional organizations, institutions of higher education, standards and accountability systems, and state and Federal law. Each of these structures and processes sends powerful signals on what is valued for teaching and learning, and the knowledge, skills and processes needed to accomplish this. As part of a coherent system, participants believe articulation of consistent goals and priorities across all relevant agencies and entities is very important.

CONCLUSION

The consensus statements summarized in this report reflect the critical issues and major priorities of the Learning Disabilities Roundtable. This report will be used as a tool for working through the many issues and activities involved in the reauthorization of IDEA and other policy initiatives of interest to OSEP decision-makers. It should also assist the OSEP Division of Research to Practice (RTP) in their mission to bring scientifically-based practices and high quality instruction to individuals with SLD across the nation. Issues such as problem-solving models, interdisciplinary problem-solving, collaborative relationships, policy coherence, and effective professional development represent exciting opportunities for rethinking educational processes affecting all individual students, including individuals with SLD. The Learning Disabilities Roundtable participants look forward to an exciting future where new, high quality practices and approaches are responsive to the most critical needs of individuals with SLD disabilities and their families, are used by practitioners, and result in improved student learning and outcomes.

Exhibit A

EXHIBIT A

Achieving Better Outcomes - Maintaining Rights: An Approach to Identifying and Serving Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

BACKGROUND

Following the August 2002 Learning Disabilities Summit: Building a Foundation for the Future, The Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, provided funding to the National Center for Learning Disabilities to conduct an LD Roundtable gathering of groups that comprise the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. The goal of the Finding Common Ground Roundtable was for key organizations in the learning disabilities community to find a common voice on issues of greatest importance, and to articulate recommendations for policy and systemic changes that reflect the latest science in teaching and learning, are responsive to the realities of personnel preparation, and can bridge the gap between research and practice in schools and individual classrooms across the country. This background paper was prepared for Roundtable members for information purposes and to generate discussion.

INTRODUCTION

As the 107th Congress begins its deliberations about the renewal and revision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the special education community is faced with a unique set of challenges and opportunities. The unprecedented growth of the specific learning disabilities (SLD) category, the manner in which children are identified as being eligible for classification under the category of SLD, the types of educational services that are provided once eligibility has been established, and the expertise needed by educators and support personnel to ensure student learning will all be subject to scrutiny during this period of public debate.

Through the Roundtable process, consensus was achieved regarding the lack of scientific evidence to support an IQ-achievement discrepancy formula as the basis for identification, classification and providing special education and related services to students with specific learning disabilities. There was also agreement that, the concept of discrepancy or intra-individual differences remains a hallmark of SLD, and that new approaches are needed to capture relevant instructional data and afford students targeted, meaningful and early instruction to circumvent and prevent learning failure. A multi-tiered, collaborative problem-solving approach, which incorporates early intervention, trial teaching, progress monitoring, and a inter-disciplinary evaluation, was named as a promising alternative.

Collaboration among regular and special education teachers and related service providers was highlighted as an essential aspect of the problem-solving approach recommended for consideration. Features of this approach include:

- All students receive high quality general education using on-going screening, progress monitoring, and assessments to design differentiated instruction and inform decision-making. This includes identifying those children at greatest risk for learning difficulties

(e.g., children with spoken and written language impairments).

- Targeted services are provided to specific students who fail to make adequate progress within general education. This would involve collaborative efforts of regular and special educators and related services personnel, especially those already providing services to these children (e.g., speech-language pathologists).

- Special individualized services are provided to students with intensive needs who are not adequately responding to high quality interventions in the first two phases of this approach.

- Students determined to be at risk for academic failure are afforded scientifically-based general education interventions for a fixed period of time. During the course of this intervention, their progress is evaluated on a frequent basis using a variety of curriculum-based measures (CBM). Students who do not display meaningful gains and who appear to be unresponsive to intervention during this period, as measured by level of performance and rate of learning, are candidates for referral for special education evaluation.

Participants in the Roundtable process cited evidence that problem-solving approaches currently in use show promise as ways to improve high quality instruction for all students. There was, however, general consensus for the need to expand and replicate these pilots, and to explore a variety of alternative identification approaches, as well as to propose ways to accomplish large-scale implementation. Participants also indicated the need for studies to determine whether this model will result in fewer students inappropriately identified as SLD, fewer students of color inappropriately identified as SLD, and timely identification of students who have learning disabilities.

The Issue

Despite decades of research, there remains considerable controversy about the nature of learning disabilities. The current model for identifying, determining eligibility, and providing services to students with SLD has served as a good faith attempt to functionally define and operationalize programs and services for this group of students who, by federal definition, demonstrate unexpected underachievement in school. It has also resulted in an unshaken commitment to guarantee and protect the rights of all students to a free and appropriate public education. It has not, however, fully realized the promise to reach and teach students with SLD in ways that anticipate and prevent student failure, promote sustained student progress once intervention services are provided, and make efficient use of fiscal and personnel resources.

The upcoming reauthorization process is an opportunity to rethink the current "wait-to-fail" models of identification, eligibility and service delivery, and to recommend alternative approaches, or enhancements to current models, that address the needs of all students who are failing to thrive academically and socially, including those with learning disabilities.

The Challenge

While current IDEA statute allows states flexibility in how to implement services and programs for students with SLD, it provides limited incentives to improve upon current models of identification, determining eligibility and service delivery, and no guidance about how more student outcome-driven models might be structured. Core issues that need to be addressed by regular and special education in order to better serve students include:

- over referral (and often inappropriate referral) for special education evaluation
- limited emphasis on identification and early intervention for students at risk for learning failure
- delay in the onset of specialized instruction and/or intervention services
- unintentional alienation of regular and special education personnel
- inefficient use of support and pupil services personnel and related service providers

Compounding these challenges is the troubling reality that all too often, educators are ill-prepared to address the needs of students with SLD. Through a combination of pre-service and in-service training, certification, and portfolios of ongoing professional development, teachers and administrators must embrace the need for change and work with diligence and optimism to:

- ensure that teachers and other school personnel are prepared to deliver high quality instruction to address the needs of students with SLD, and that they have the kinds of assistance, support and resources they need to address the learning and emotional needs of all students
- provide systematic and systemic administrative support for interdisciplinary collaboration at the school building and district level, and
- facilitate educators' access to research-based strategies (and strategies for which there is limited but convincing clinical evidence) that are essential for building and sustaining learning environments that result in improved student learning across the grades

A Proposed Solution

The preamble to the 1997 amendments of IDEA encourages the use of targeted intervention as part of a comprehensive problem-solving process to assure that students with disabilities are provided special education services. Such an approach could simplify the path from concern to action, calling upon parents and school personnel to act quickly and with purpose and precision in order to address students' learning difficulties.

One solution being proposed is not based on a single model, but rather reflects a service delivery approach that guides educators to anticipate, recognize, and document students' learning needs and to provide timely and well-targeted, effective instruction. It is designed to encourage flexibility and collaboration among regular and special education and related services personnel, and reduce the lengthy cycles of school failure many students experience before getting the help they

need. This approach is based on a multi-tiered process that improves upon current models of special education service delivery, emphasizing effective instruction and response to treatment rather than test scores and discrepancy formulae as the gateway to better learning outcomes.

Incorporated into this approach are the protections and procedural safeguards provided under IDEA, leaving open the option for parents and educators to initiate referral for special education evaluation in instances where, for example, intervention services are not provided in a timely manner, school personnel lack sufficient knowledge and resources to provide research-based intervention, or insufficient information is available to determine how best to address a student's particular instructional needs. It is particularly sensitive to meeting the needs of young school-age children, and should result in the added benefit of careful documentation and shared responsibility for student learning, both in general and special education settings. It is expected that these benefits will extend across the grades and throughout a student's K-12 academic career. This flexible, collaborative problem-solving approach seeks to minimize the risk of students being overlooked or caught in a system where delay in classification allows students to continue to fail to learn. In addition, it could ensure that students identified for special education and related services are those truly in need of specialized instruction, and not those whose instructional needs could be adequately addressed by re-focused regular education efforts or remedial and supplementary educational programs.

An intervention-oriented approach is compatible with features of the current IQ-achievement discrepancy model, and seeks to improve upon it in ways that are closely aligned with good teaching practice. Since it is based upon the student's response to intervention, the approach continues to recognize unexpected underachievement at the core of the eligibility process. Such an approach is also consistent with existing exclusionary factors, and allows for clinical judgement to be part of the identification process.

The process of determining student eligibility for special education services can be enhanced by the use of effective response-to-intervention procedures. IQ test scores alone, popularly reported as part of the IQ-achievement discrepancy formula used by most school systems, are of little value to parents and teachers, because they lack the treatment validity necessary to inform the teaching process. While IQ tests do not measure or predict a student's response to instruction, measures of neuropsychological functioning and information processing could be included in evaluation protocols in ways that document the areas of strength and vulnerability needed to make informed decisions about eligibility for services. An essential characteristic of SLD is failure to achieve at a level of expected performance based upon the student's other abilities. IQ testing would still be used at the discretion of interdisciplinary evaluation teams, and may be particularly useful when questions of cognitive level arise. In fact, when there is a question about the possibility of mental retardation being the primary reason for lack of response to intervention, such screening and assessment devices would need to be used to rule out this condition.

Proponents of this approach suggest the following positive aspects:

- Decisions about students' specific instructional needs are based primarily on a student's lack of responsiveness to effective instruction. This means that a first step toward identifying students who might need special education services is to determine whether the instructional environment is adequately individualized, structured and supportive to facilitate learning for all capable students.

- Targeted interventions are implemented with fidelity, and data are collected on student performance. The effects of interventions are monitored and decisions about types (and intensity) of ongoing instruction and support are made for individual students at the classroom level.

- Student progress is carefully documented within clear timelines, and response to instruction provides additional validation of students' specific instructional needs, as well as informs decisions about how each student could best be served by special and regular education and related services personnel.

- Instructional interventions are formulated and implemented to ensure that students have access to general education curricula, and to provide support needed for mastery of literacy, learning strategies and social skills critical for school success.

- Students in need of special education services are provided relevant instruction and support, with ongoing collaboration among regular and special education and related services personnel.

- Students exit special education services as soon as objective data indicate that they have made sufficient progress to achieve independently in the general education classroom without special education services. The decision to end special education services does not mean that the student no longer has a disability or that a decision to re-enter the system could not be made at a later date. The option to retain, exit or re-enter students would be made on an individual basis and be reflected in an IEP or transitional IEP process.

Potential Administrative Benefits of this Approach

Models for early identification and intervention prior to special education referral have been in operation for over 20 years. Terms used to describe this approach have included: Teacher Assistance Team Model, Pre-Referral Intervention Model, Mainstreaming Assistance Team Model, School-Based Consultation Team Model, and Problem-Solving Model.[1] Successful demonstration projects have been implemented at individual school, school district, inter-district, and statewide levels in various parts of the country. Anecdotal and program evaluation data, while limited and largely unpublished, have demonstrated the benefits of empirically-proven instructional practices in general education classrooms[2], curriculum-based assessment linked to instruction[3], preventative and remedial supports and consultation services in general education[4], data-based problem solving implemented by intervention assistance teams and other collaborative mechanisms[5], and multi-tiered systems for using response to intervention to determine eligibility[6]. Data from these projects and

[1] Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Chalfant, Pysh & Moultrie, 1979; Knackendoffel, Robinson, Deshler & Schumacker, 1992; Elksnin & Elksnin, 1989; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1988; House, Zimmer & McInerney, 1991; Rosenfeld, 1991.

[2] Beck, 1993; King & Torgesen, 2002

[3] Deno, Fuchs, Marston & Shin, 2001; Kaminski & Good, 1998: Knoff & Batsche, 1995

[4] Graden, Casy & Bonstrom, 1985; Illinois State Board of Education, 1997; Lennon & Slesinski, 1999; Slavin & Madden, 1999; Smith, Ross & Casey, 1994

[5] Carroll & Carroll, 2000; Chalfant, Pysh & Moultrie, 1979; Conway & Kovaleski, 1998, Graden, 1988; Hartman & Fay, 1996; Jenkins, 2001 Papandrea, Walkley, DeLorme & McNamara, 2001; Potter,2002

[6] Deno, Grimes, Reschly & Schrag, 2001; Harley & Prasse, 2002; Marston, in press; Reschly, Tilly & Grimes, 1999

reform initiatives have indicated such benefits as:

- increased accountability for student learning in general and special education
- decreased numbers of students placed in high incidence special education categories
- potential for reduction in disproportionate referrals of minority students for special education evaluation
- reduction in the number of evaluations conducted that do not result in either special education classification or improved learning outcomes for students who are experiencing school failure
- improved problem solving efforts by regular education personnel
- positive reactions of participants and stakeholders

These efforts have also provided data to suggest that intervention-based models can result in improved accountability and allocation of personnel resources as exemplified by:

- increased time for collaboration among regular and special education teachers, administrators and related service providers
- increased opportunities for related service providers (e.g. psychologists, speech-language pathologists) to engage in activities that relate directly to students' lack of success and that support efforts to provide targeted instruction and monitor ongoing progress

Personnel Requirements for Implementation

Questions remain about the conditions under which this service delivery approach can be successfully implemented, and efforts need to be made to identify the specific resources necessary to take such a model to scale. It is clear, however, that a number of conditions will need to be met and challenges overcome, particularly with regard to bolstering building-level leadership and providing adequate support, resources and expertise through expanded roles and responsibilities for all personnel involved in the educational process. Examples include:

Building principals will need to:

- develop and oversee school-based instructional support team efforts
- provide supportive school environment that encourages collaboration
- provide ongoing, high-quality professional development to all instructional and support personnel
- ensure adherence to timelines and cost controls
- provide caseloads and schedules that facilitate individualized instruction, documentation

of response to instruction, and collaboration among regular and special educators, related services, and support personnel

Regular education teachers will need to:

- gain access, training, and support in the use of research-based instructional interventions that address students' deficits in areas such as reading, math and written language, throughout the grades
- become proficient in the administration and scoring of progress-monitoring procedures such as pre- and post- tests on appropriate assessments, curriculum-based assessment measures (CBM), and other means for documenting rates of learning and overall progress
- design and implement classroom environments that promote optimal use of instructional time and responsive instructional techniques, collaboration among professionals, and ongoing data collection to determine student's response to treatment

Special educators and related service providers (including school psychologists and speech-language pathologists) will need to:

- access training and gain proficiency needed to assist regular educators with activities such as selecting appropriate materials, conducting assessments, and evaluating progress
- provide consultation regarding behavioral and instructional problems, with decreased demand for traditional routine and repeated comprehensive assessments
- provide expertise and guidance to parents, educators and administrative faculty as members of the school-based support team

Parents will need to:

- be apprised of information regarding specific expectations concerning academic progress and research-based interventions (as well as strategies that have limited convincing clinical evidence) that are most likely to contribute to their child's educational success
- continue to refer their children for screening or evaluation when learning difficulties are suspected or observed
- continue to function as essential members of the school-based team

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- continue to refer their children for screening or evaluation when learning difficulties are suspected or observed
- continue to function as essential members of the school-based team

- give their signed permission prior to formal evaluation for special education assessment or services

- continue to have participatory and approval roles in developing and reviewing IEPs

Specific roles and responsibilities will need to be identified for other stakeholders as well, including university faculty and state and local education agencies.

Questions, Concerns and Resources Needed to Support this Approach

Successful projects have provided promising evidence that response-to-treatment (or intervention-oriented) approaches to identifying and serving students with specific learning disabilities are viable alternatives to the current system of serving children with SLD. For this approach to be embraced and operationalized by the education community on a large scale, a number of questions and concerns must be addressed, resources be made available, and activities put in place, including:

1. While data indicate that this approach results in fewer numbers of students being referred for special education evaluation, insufficient data are available regarding the effects of this approach upon student outcomes. Large scale evaluations need to be conducted to determine in what ways this approach improves system-wide change (i.e. prevalence rates), how these approaches effect student learning, and whether student gains are sustained over time.

2. Before moving toward widespread adoption of alternative approaches to identifying students as eligible for the specific learning disability classification, further study is needed to clearly describe students, professional competencies, settings, services, and interventions so the most effective features of the alternatives can be replicated and moved into large scale settings. Efforts should be made to identify required or optional components, their sequence and timelines for implementation, as well as to detail the staffing and the roles and responsibilities of different personnel. Evaluation is also needed to address whether this approach will result in more timely service delivery and will safeguard against it becoming another wait-to-fail model.

3. A multi-tiered approach to serving students is sufficiently flexible that it can be personalized to classrooms and school communities. However, the implication of a student's status and movement to and from different tiers is not well understood. Clarification is needed to explain and demonstrate how students qualify for and are provided services in each tier of a response-to-treatment approach.

4. There needs to be a well-coordinated and sustained effort to begin systematically implementing this approach in the early grades, and concurrently, to studying the applicability of this approach for students at later grade levels and in different types of school settings, in preparation for more wide spread implementation over the next few years. Information is also needed about specific criteria for classification and transition to and from different levels and types of programs and supports.

5. The infrastructure needed to deliver services to students using this approach will vary greatly, as will the effort and resources needed to implement the necessary staff training. Considerable thought and planning needs to be invested in understanding how such an approach can be brought to scale in different geographic locations and in

communities with unique demographic, socioeconomic and cultural-linguistic characteristics and needs.

6. Further specificity is needed with regard to the eligibility criteria for inclusion in the SLD category, including external factors that might be the primary reason for underachievement.

7. Concerns have been expressed regarding the potential for exacerbating the already difficult process of identifying students who are both gifted and have specific learning disabilities using this approach. Further research is needed to understand how the unique challenges presented by this sub-set of students with special needs can be met via problem-solving models.

8. Teachers and parents continue to express concerns about students who are functioning at lower academic levels but who do not qualify for an SLD classification. Efforts must be made to both understand how the needs of these students will be addressed by this approach, and how assistance will be provided to classroom teachers so that the needs of these students can be met.

9. Concerns have been expressed that this approach risks diminishing specially-designed, individualized instruction for students with SLD. The scope and purpose of special education services needs to be explicitly defined and exemplified as part of any alternative approach for identification, eligibility and intervention.

10. Successful implementation of this approach means that classroom teachers will need to administer repeated measures of student progress and interpret progress monitoring data to identify students who are not performing commensurate with their typically-achieving peers. It also means that special educators and related service providers will need to engage in a range of targeted activities that assist regular educators to select and effectively implement instructional materials and strategies that result in improved student performance. Formal training and ongoing technical assistance and support will be necessary for classroom teachers and related service providers to perform these tasks with fidelity and to use performance data in ways that inform classroom instruction.

11. States would need to be given additional incentives to pilot or more fully implement such approaches, to document effectiveness for students with SLD, and to identify funding sources (such as IDEA and No Child Left Behind) and new paradigms that utilize federal, state and local dollars for large scale implementation with integrity.

12. Success of this approach is predicated upon effective instruction in general education classrooms and a commitment by regular educators to a tier delivery system of instruction and support. Regular and special education teachers and support personnel will need to be encouraged and supported in collaborative problem-solving efforts, ongoing progress monitoring, and in activities that provide targeted instruction for all students who experience learning failure.

13. Pre-service education and ongoing professional development programs need to have access to and readily promote the use of research-based effective practices, especially in the area of early reading instruction and behavior.

14. Concerns have been expressed that such an approach depends upon developing and maintaining a cadre of well-qualified teachers, administrators and support personnel. Decisions will need to be made about specific standards and competencies for teaching and support personnel who work with students with SLD. Sufficient funding and time will need to be allocated for ongoing professional development and collaborative opportunities among teachers and support personnel in all content areas and grades, as well as for administrators who shape service delivery systems and school communities as a whole.

15. Schools will need to clarify the types of services available to students through compensatory education and IDEA, as well as those accessed through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Avenues of information must be created so parents and educators can understand and access unique and sometimes overlapping systems of instruction and support.

16. Procedural safeguards and parent participation must continue to be seen as crucial to the successful implementation of an alternative approach. Parents must continue to be recognized as full partners with schools, especially as these approaches involve instructional and support personnel in different ways. Parents and professionals must continue to be bound by specific requirements that ensure mutual awareness of educational goals and outcomes, changes in settings or support services, and adjustments in instruction and interventions.

17. Further clarification is needed to understand how this approach will better differentiate between students across disability categories (i.e. specific learning disabilities, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, speech/language impaired, other health impaired) and improve decision making about appropriate instructional and behavioral needs and supports.

Moving Forward

The current IDEA reauthorization process has provided a unique opportunity for members of the advocacy, teaching, research and parent communities to come together and articulate specific thoughts about ways to improve outcomes for students with SLD. Lawmakers and policy officials are listening for a common voice that calls for action to be taken in several areas to more effectively address the needs of students with SLD through the IDEA. Adequate instruction and documentation of progress should be the cornerstone of effective education for students with SLD, and the practical application of this approach is worthy of careful attention as it holds great promise for overcoming some of the barriers to success faced by the general and educational communities during the past 25 years.

There is little doubt that IDEA reauthorization will take place, and that the provision of special education services will be protected under the law. What is less clear are the ways in which the benefits of our vastly improved knowledge about teaching and research-based instruction will be reflected in the law, regulations and practice. Our hope is that we can contribute to a reauthorization process in ways that:

- empower educational personnel to work as co-equals, tapping their different and complementary sets of skills for the benefit of students with SLD

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- enhance the efficiency of general and special education systems of instruction and support

- ensure improved educational outcomes through more effective approaches to identification, eligibility and intervention, and through more effective professional development

In keeping with the first federal special education legislation in 1975, the tenets of this approach are not grounded solely in research. They also emanate from the ideals of the society in which policy change are advocated. Progress toward better education practice begins with acknowledgement that the current system of service delivery is not serving all students with SLD effectively, and that current models requiring reliance on a discrepancy between IQ and achievement can prevent students from receiving assistance in a timely and efficient manner. There also needs to be agreement, in concept, that better models must be created for serving the educational and behavioral needs of students with SLD. One such approach, based on a student's response to effective instruction, should be considered as it is highly regarded by researchers and policy officials as a promising alternative to current practice.

Recommending changes to a system that provides a lifeline of services and supports to millions of children nationwide demands extraordinary precision and care. The willingness to challenge the status quo in the face of this daunting reality demands not only cooperation and trust among stakeholders but also a commitment to using both clinical judgment and data in decision making about models for identification, eligibility, and intervention. It further demands that we fine tune and configure policy and practice so that our models for service delivery reflect our best knowledge about effective instruction and how to bring these models to scale.

Selected Resources

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Appendix A

Appendix A:

CONSENSUS STATEMENTS

Nature of Specific Learning Disabilities

- *The concept of Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) is valid, supported by strong converging evidence.*
- *Specific learning disabilities are neurologically based and intrinsic to the individual.*
- *Individuals with SLD show intra-individual differences in skills and abilities.*
- *Specific learning disabilities persist across the life span, though manifestations and intensity may vary as a function of developmental stage and environmental demands.*
- *Specific learning disabilities may occur in combination with other disabling conditions, but they are not due to other conditions, such as mental retardation, behavioral disturbance, lack of opportunities to learn, primary sensory deficits, or multilingualism.*
- *Specific learning disabilities are evident across ethnic, cultural, language and economic groups.*

Identification

- *Identification should include a student-centered, comprehensive evaluation and problem solving approach that ensures students who have a specific learning disability are efficiently identified.*
- *Regular education must assume active responsibility for delivery of high quality instruction, research-based interventions, and prompt identification of individuals at risk while collaborating with special education and related services personnel.*

Eligibility

- *The ability-achievement discrepancy formula should not be used for determining eligibility.*
- *Decisions regarding eligibility for special education services must draw from information collected from a comprehensive individual evaluation using multiple methods and sources of relevant information.*
- *Decisions on eligibility must be made through an interdisciplinary team, using informed clinical judgment, directed by relevant data, and based on student needs and strengths.*
- *Decisions on eligibility must be made in a timely manner.*

- *Based on an individualized evaluation and continuous progress monitoring, a student who has been identified as having a specific learning disability may need different levels of special education and related services under IDEA at various times during the school experience.*

Intervention

- *The field should continue to advocate for the use of scientifically-based practices. However, in areas where an adequate research base does not exist, data should be gathered on the success of promising practices.*

- *Schools and educators must have access to information about scientifically-based practices and promising practices that have been validated in the settings where they are to be implemented.*

- *Students with SLD require intensive, iterative (recursive), explicit scientifically-based instruction that is monitored on an on-going basis to achieve academic success.*

- *Students with SLD require a continuum of intervention options through regular and special education across all grades and ages.*

- *Interventions must be timely and matched to the specific learning and behavioral needs of the student.*

- *An intervention is most effective when it is implemented consistently, with fidelity to its design, and at a sufficient level of intensity and duration.*

- *Regular and special education must be coordinated as part of a coherent system which is held accountable for the educational outcomes of students with SLD.*

Professional Development

- *The content of professional development must address the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to increase staff and school capacity to implement effective interventions for diverse learners.*

- *Professional development must address the organizational and cultural context needed to ensure on-going professional learning and development for all service providers.*

- *Professional development must be structured to fit the way adults acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes.*

- *An on-going, coherent, integrated system of pre-service and in-service education must be provided.*

- *Alignment is needed across the agencies and structures that shape professional development and communicate what is valued and expected in schools.*

Appendix B

APPENDIX B:
PARTICIPANT LIST

Learning Disabilities Finding Common Ground
Roundtable Meeting Participants

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